

Development within the Project Corridor is consistent with the NIPC goal of encouraging development within existing communities and within areas served by public transportation, including commuter rail. The Corridor is highly developed with communities. In 1990, 41 percent of the Project Corridor's land area was within the boundary of a municipal government compared to 27 percent municipal land coverage for remaining Will County. As of Spring 2001, the percent incorporated area within the Project Corridor increased 16 percent, to 57 percent of Corridor lands as a result of the incorporation of over 50 percent of Homer Township into the Village of Homer Glen. Therefore, development within the Project Corridor is consistent with the NIPC goal of encouraging development within existing communities.

Population density within the Project Corridor in 1990 was 500 persons per square kilometer (1,120 per square mile) verses 172 persons per square kilometer (444 per square mile) for the County. This high population density makes the Project Corridor relatively well suited for public transportation. The Project Corridor is served by Pace bus service, as well as Metra Commuter rail. Metra operates three existing commuter rail lines within the Corridor and a fourth is proposed. Therefore, development within the Project Corridor is consistent with the NIPC goal of encouraging development within areas served by public transportation, including commuter rail.

Development within the area is also consistent with NIPC's goal of encouraging development contiguous with existing development and in keeping the metro area compact by focusing development close to the urban core. Regional growth between 1990 and 2020 will require 1,300 to 1,550 square kilometers (500 to 600 square miles) of land region wide. The Project Corridor represents one of the last major areas with land open for development within a 48 kilometer (30 mile) radius of the Chicago central area. Total vacant land, including the smallest parcels, within 48 kilometers (30 miles) of downtown Chicago amounts to 297 square kilometers (115 square miles), of which 30 percent exists south of I-55 and within the Project Corridor [\(ACG, 2000\)](#).

There are strong market forces influencing continued development within the Project Corridor including proximity to regional job centers within the O'Hare vicinity and DuPage County. Given these factors, this area will develop with or without the I-355 South Extension. It is for this reason that the differences in population and employment forecasts with and without the I-355 South Extension are minimal. However, construction of the I-355 South Extension would allow for higher density development in the vicinity of the facility, thus attracting growth that would otherwise occur to the west of I-55; an area further out from the regional core [\(ACG, 2000\)](#).

The Tollroad/Freeway Alternative being the highest level facility would provide the best access to the Project Corridor among the Build Alternatives and would most effectively focus growth within the Project Corridor in conformance with NIPC growth policy.

Environmentally Sensitive Development

Preserving environmentally sensitive resources is another planning priority of regional, county and municipal government. At the regional level, preserving environmentally sensitive resources while providing efficient transportation facilities and services is one

of seven principal goals of the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan. This goal incorporates six environmental objectives. Objectives of relevance are:

- Develop a transportation system that avoids or minimizes adverse impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, and valuable man-made or natural resources.
- Encourage the design of transportation facilities that minimize adverse noise and vibration impacts.
- Encourage the development of transportation rights-of-way to reduce maintenance costs; improve biodiversity, water quality and aesthetics; and manage stormwater.

Also at the regional level, the adopted NIPC regional growth strategy includes the following policy:

- Protect floodplains, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas from development. This policy encourages the preservation and protection of sensitive lands within built-up, developing and rural areas of the region

At the county and municipal level, the Will County Land Use Plan states “protecting environmental areas and linked open spaces as a principal goal”. Land use plans of the Project Corridor municipalities include policy statements such as: The City shall take actions to maintain and manage natural resources and protect them from loss and degradation (Lockport, 1997). “The bluffs, drainage ways, wetlands, and mature groves of trees are some of the natural features that Lemont must strive to protect from the impacts of land development” (Lemont 1993). and, as a primary objective “Preserve existing natural features – streams, wetlands, floodplains, major tree stands and significant drainage swales” (New Lenox, 1997).

Consistent with these goals and objectives, county and municipal government will continue to regulate development in an environmentally sensitive manner. To assess the consistency of the Build Alternatives to environmentally sensitive development, the environmental effects of each Alternative were reviewed. The review was based on existing information provided by environmental resource agencies and year 2000 aerial photography.

The environmental effects were determined based on a footprint for each Build Alternative defined by their general right-of-way limits. The Tollroad/Freeway footprint was defined as a 91 meter (300 foot) right-of-way. The Lemont Bypass footprint was defined as a 91 meter (300 foot) right-of-way for the Tollroad/Freeway segment from the northern project terminus to 127th Street, and a 46 meter (150 foot) right-of-way from 127th Street to I-80. The Enhanced Arterial Alternative footprint was defined as a 40 meter (130 foot) right-of-way, except for the Gougar Road segment from 127th Street to I-80. This segment was based on a 46 meter (150 foot) right-of-way. The environmental effects for the Enhanced Arterial were recorded for only those segments of the alignment proposed for widening. Those segments consisted of Gougar Road from I-80 to IL Route 171, 135th Street from New Avenue to Gougar Road and IL Route 171 from Gougar Road to IL Route 83. Environmental effects were not recorded for those segments of the Enhanced Arterial alignment where widening was not proposed because new right-of-way would

not be acquired. Table 3-3 presents the environmental effects of each Alternative. Exhibit 3-4 locates the affected environmental resources.

The review found no substantive difference in environmental effects between the Alternatives. The difference in wetland effects between Alternatives ranged between 0.8 to 1.6 hectares (2.0 to 4.0 acres). This difference is minor considering the scale of the project and the 53.61 hectare (132.42 acres) of wetlands within the Project Corridor.

As for parks, forest preserves and Illinois Natural Area Inventory (INAI) sites. The comparative effects between Alternatives would be greatest for the Lemont Bypass followed by the Tollroad/Freeway and Enhanced Arterial Alternatives. Both the Lemont Bypass and the Tollroad/Freeway Alternatives cross Keepataw Forest Preserve. Keepataw Forest Preserve is located south of Bluff Road at the Will/Cook County line at the North end of the Project Corridor. The preserve contains 87 hectares (215 acres) of floodplain, upland forest, seeps and small springs. The effects to Keepataw Forest Preserve comprise the majority of Park and Forest Preserve effects caused by the Tollroad/Freeway Alternative. However, the Lemont Bypass would also affect Higinbotham Woods and Pilcher Park at the south end of the Project Corridor in addition to Keepataw Forest Preserve. Higinbotham Woods and Pilcher Park are large parks containing 80 plus hectares (200 plus acres) of mesic, wet-mesic, upland and wet- bottomland forest, as well as and two

Table 3-3 Environmental Effects by Alternative			
Category	Alternative		
	Tollroad/Freeway	Lemont Bypass	Enhanced Arterial
Wetlands	3.9 ha (9.7 ac)	3.1 ha (7.7 ac)	2.3 ha (5.7 ac)
Parks/Forest Preserves	16.5 ha (40.7 ac)	21.2 ha (52.4 ac)	4.7 ha (11.6 ac)
Illinois Natural Area Inventory Sites (INAI)	0	2	2
Archeological High Probability Area Crossings	4	6	6
Historic/Cultural Sites/Districts	3	11	11
Threatened and Endangered Species	2	2	0
Stream Crossings	10	9	13
Floodplain Crossings	12	15	13
Schools Adjacent to Alignments	2	3	2
Cemeteries	1	2	1
Res/Comm/Ind/Ag Displacements	45	42	76
Sensitive Receptors Potentially Impacted by Noise*	29	117	400
Farmland	137 ha (338 ac)	70 ha (173 ac)	32 ha (80 ac)

* Assumed a zone of effect of 152 meters (500 feet) either side of the centerline of each alternative.